

Washington, D.C. On Thursday, the President will travel to Fort Benning, Georgia, to have lunch with the troops and watch a military weapons demonstration. Representative Sanford Bishop, U.S. Congressman from Georgia's Second District which includes Fort Benning, has been asked to join President Bush on the visit. The event follows this evening's address to the nation where the President outlined his plan to send an additional 20,000 troops to Iraq.

In anticipation of the visit, Congressman Bishop issued the following statement:

"I support our troops, their families and all who have sacrificed so much for America in this war. The units from Fort Benning, our other military bases, as well as the men and women of the National Guard and Reserve components have performed exceptionally well under the most challenging of conditions. I sincerely congratulate these brave men and women and thank them for their enormous sacrifice.

However, I, along with many others who have supported the Iraq efforts in the past, have serious reservations about the President's new way forward.

Like General Schoomaker and the other U.S. Military professionals, I believe we should not surge without a purpose and that purpose should be measurable in its outcome. Thus far, the President has not set forth a clear marker against which the purpose and outcome can be measured. For example:

* From December 2003 to April 2004, there was a surge from 122,000 to 137,000 troops. Nevertheless, April 2004 was one of the deadliest months for American forces (Brookings Institution, 12/21/06, www.icasualties.org, USA Today, 3/4/04).

* From November 2004 to March 2005, following the Fallujah offensive which sought to increase security for the January constitutional elections, forces were increased from 137,000 to 150,000. There was no long-term security impact (Brookings Institution 12/21/2006, NYTimes 12/2/04).

* From September to December 2005, troop levels increased to 160,000 in order to provide a secure environment for the constitutional referendum and parliamentary elections. While the elections went off without major violence, the troop escalations had little long-term impact on quelling sectarian violence or attacks on American troops (Brookings Institution, 12/21/06, www.icasualties.org).

* In June of last year, there was an effort to secure Baghdad by increasing not only American but also Iraqi forces. By October, General William Caldwell acknowledged that the operation and troop increase was a failure and had not met expectations of sustaining a reduction in the levels of violence (CNN 12/19/06, Washington Post 7/26/06, Brookings Institution, 12/21/06).

General Abazaid, General Dempsey, General Schoomaker and General Casey have all agreed that heavy, sustained American military presence will not solve the problems in Iraq over the long-term. The purpose and outcome are not measurable.

Prime Minister Maliki met with President Bush on November 30 of last year but did not ask for more American troops as part of the new Baghdad security plan. Maliki's idea was to lower the U.S. profile, instead of raising it (Washington Post, 1/10/2006).

General Schoomaker testified that the Army is not capable at this time of generating and sustaining the required forces to wage the global war on terror along with all the other operational requirements without the National Guard and Reserves. Over the last five years, the strategic demand for deployed combat brigades and other supporting units is placing a severe strain on the all-volunteer army. The time between deployments for combat teams is less than one year. Without repeated use of reserve components through re-mobilization, we will break the active army's capacity (Testimony of General Schoomaker before the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves, 12/14/06).

To surge, forces will have to be moved from other strategic locations around the world; the Reserves and National Guard components who have already served will have to be re-deployed; and new equipment, weapons, ammunition and other materials will have to be procured. This leaves no reserve capacity for any unforeseen future requirements.

There is substantial doubt regarding the ability of the Iraqi security forces to maintain their level of troop strength and performance for the new surge, given their history of desertions and AWOLs in the heat of battle which exposes American troops to more deadly risk.

As a member of Congress who sits on the Defense and Military Construction/ VA Subcommittees of the Appropriations Committee which must fund these efforts, I take seriously my duty to support and protect our young men and women who must execute the orders of our Commander-in-Chief. Ultimately, it is the President's call and not mine. However, I feel it my patriotic duty to express my serious misgivings about his proposed actions."